

THE TRICKSTER • VIXEN

A Byelorussian

Folk Fairy-Tale





THE TRICKSTER VIXEN

A BYELORUSSIAN FOLK FAIRY-TALE

Adapted by A. YAKIMOVITCH

Translated from the Byelorussian by V. VOLINSKIE

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ONCE UPON A TIME there lived an old man and an old woman. They owned nothing, except one hen. They became so poor that at last they had nothing to eat. So the old man said:

"Old woman, old woman, shall we cook the hen, then, or what?"

But the old woman raised her hands in horror:

"What ever are you thinking of, old man? I'd rather go hungry than give our hen to cook!"

The hen heard this, ran out into the courtyard, found there a bean and brought it to the old woman.



The old man saw it and said:

"All right, old woman, then cook the bean, at least."

The old woman looked at the bean and said:

"Old man, my dear old man, can we make a meal with one bean? I couldn't even find a suitable pot for it. Let's plant the bean. When it grows we can bake a big bean pie."

"Where shall we plant it?" asked the old man.

"In the field."

"In the field a crow will peck it out..."

"Then in the courtyard."

"In the courtyard a hen will peck it up..."

"Well, let's plant it in the hut under the bench."

"All right," the old man agreed, and planted the bean under the bench in the hut.



The bean came up and began growing. It grew and grew until it was as high as the bench.

"What shall we do, old woman?" asked the old man.

"We shall have to take the bench away."

The old man took the bench away, but the bean went on growing higher and higher until it reached the very ceiling.

"What shall we do, old woman?" asked the old man again.

"We must make a hole in the ceiling."



The old man made a hole in the ceiling, but the bean went on growing higher and higher, until it reached the very roof.

The old man made a hole in the roof as well. The bean looked out at the light and began growing even quicker. Soon the beanstalk reached up to the sky.

The old man took a bag, climbed up the beanstalk, picked all the ripe pods and climbed down again.

The old woman was delighted — the old man had brought back a whole bag of bean pods!

“Well, now we can make a pie!”



The old woman emptied the pods, dried the beans in the oven, ground them up and mixed the dough on a pastry-board.

The dough rose and rose, and tried to get off the pastry-board. The old woman put it on a wooden oven-spade, decorated with various patterns to make it look nice, and then put it into the oven to bake. But the pie rose and rose, and tried to burst out of the oven. The old woman just opened the oven-door to take a look, and the pie jumped down on the floor, ran out of the door and vanished...



The old man and the old woman went running after the pie. But it was no use! They could never catch up with it.

The pie rolled into the forest. There a cunning red vixen came towards it. She took the pie, ate out the soft filling, put some fir-cones into it instead and ran with the pie under her arm to some shepherd-boys.

"Shepherd-boys, shepherd-boys, give me a three-year-old bull-calf and in exchange I'll give you this pie."

The shepherd-boys saw that the vixen had a delicious pie, its golden crust all gleaming, and they wanted so much to try it.



They agreed to the exchange, and gave the vixen a three-year-old bull-calf.

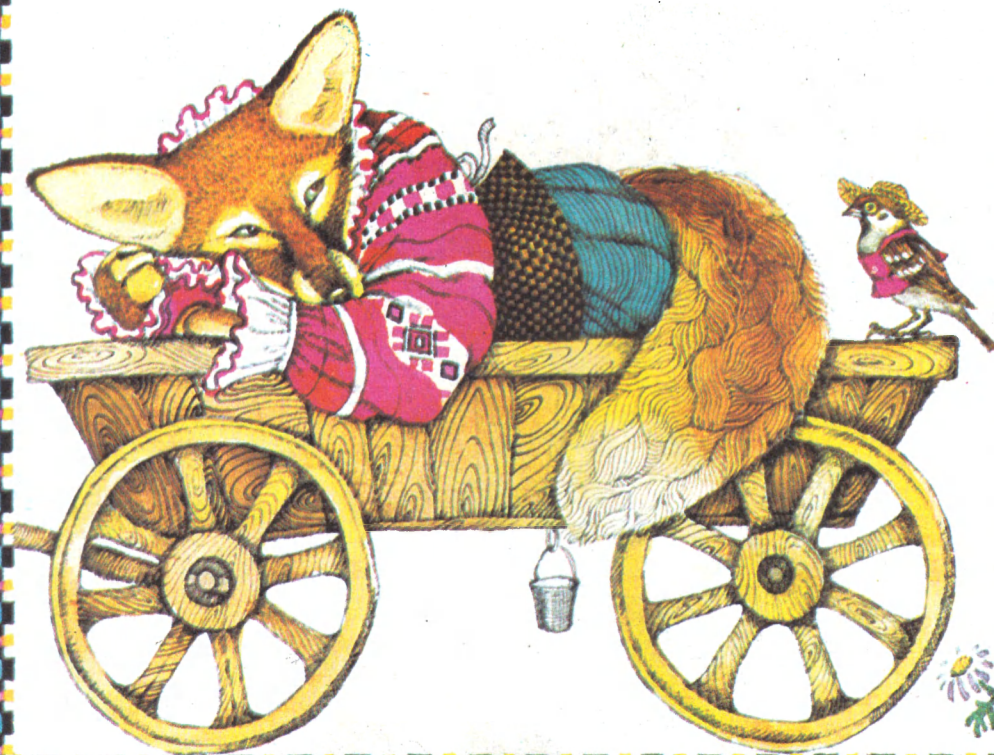
"But see you don't eat the pie before I ride over the hill," said the vixen.

She sat on the bull-calf and started off. As soon as she rode over the hill, the shepherd-boys said:

"Let's all upon the sand sit down, and eat a slice each, golden-brown!"

They broke open the pie-crust, but there inside were only fir-cones... The trickster-vixen had cheated them!

Riding along on the bull-calf, the vixen looked round and saw an empty cart by the road-side, and not far away a man was



ploughing. She crept up to the cart, harnessed the bull-calf, made herself comfortable on the soft straw, and off she went, prodding the bull-calf with a stick.

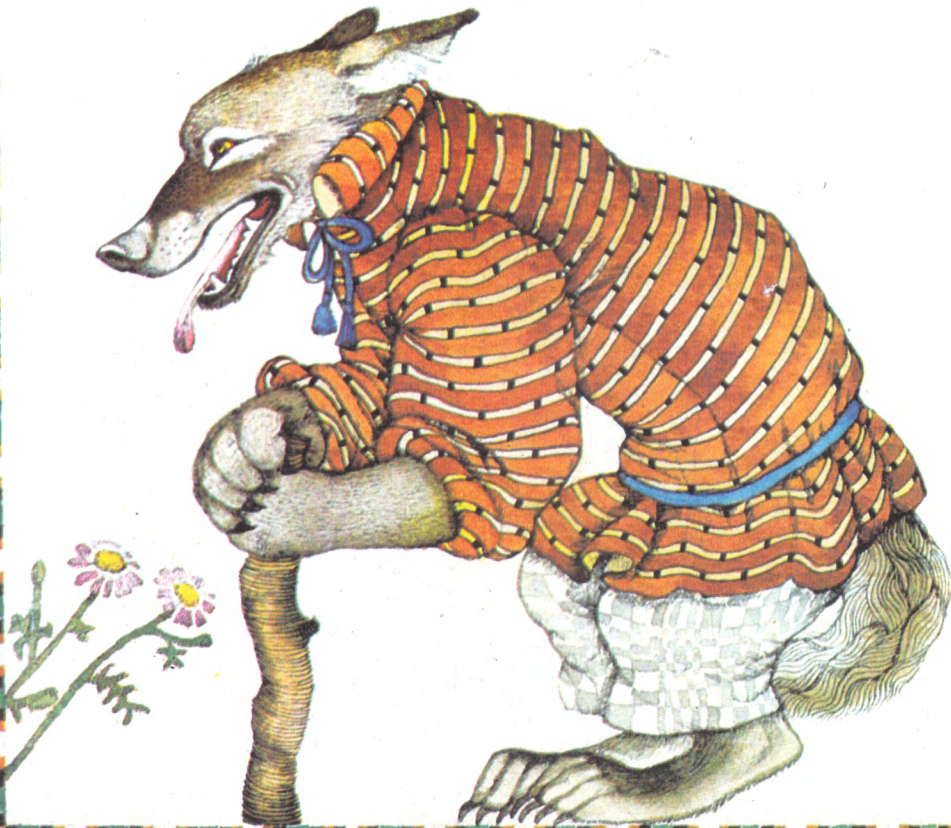
Soon she came to the forest, and there she met a wolf. He was on his last legs, and could scarcely drag one paw after the other.

"Where are you going, sister vixen?" he asked.

"Over hill and dale, to a distant vale."

"What for?"

"There, it seems, they keep so many hens, that even hawks don't eat them!"



"Are there any rams there?" asked the wolf, licking his lips.
"Heaps and heaps!"

"Oh, sister vixen, take me along with you. Carry my tail on your cart, at least."

"What's the sense in carrying only your tail? Jump on!"

The wolf jumped up and sat on the cart. On they went, and soon they met a bear.

"Where are you going, friends?"

"Over hill and dale, to a distant vale".

"What for?"

"There, it seems, they keep so many hens, that even hawks don't eat them!" said the vixen.



"There, it seems, are heaps and heaps of rams," said the wolf.

"Have they much honey there?"

"There, it seems, are rivers flowing with honey!"

The bear was delighted.

"Will you take me along with you? Carry one of my paws on your cart, at least."

"What's the sense in carrying only one paw? Jump on!"

There were three of them now sitting on the cart, and on they went. But all of a sudden the shaft broke. The vixen said to the bear:

"Get down, brother bear, and fetch a new shaft."

The bear went into the thicket, found a fallen fir-tree, and dragged it to the cart. The vixen, seeing this, started to scold him:

"Ah, brother bear, what a great fool you are! Will such a trunk do for a shaft?"



Then she said to the wolf:

"Get down, brother wolf, and fetch a thin shaft."

Off went the wolf, and brought back a crooked fir branch. The vixen scolded him as well, and went to fetch a shaft herself.

In the meantime the bear and the wolf ate the three-year-old bull-calf, stuffed the hide with straw, stood the stuffed animal on its legs, and off they went, chuckling to themselves.

The vixen came back and looked around, but saw neither the wolf nor the bear, only the bull-calf standing there. She fixed the new shaft, got on the cart, prodded the bull-calf with the stick, but—flop! — he just fell over.

The vixen looked at the fallen bull-calf, and guessed what had happened.



"You just wait! I'll make you pay for this!" threatened the vixen, and went on her way.

The long and short of it was, that the autumn caught the vixen still on the rode. Suddenly she met a wolf, the one who had eaten the bull-calf.

"Good day to you, brother wolf. How are you getting on?"

"None too well," said the wolf. "I'm chieled to the marrow in this rain. My teeth are chattering."

"You must get yourself a new leather coat made," said the vixen.

"You are right, sister vixen," agreed the wolf.

He ran to the pasture, seized a sheep, and dragged it into the forest.



"Is that enough for a leather coat?" he asked.
"No, that's not enough," said the vixen.
The wolf fetched a second sheep.
"Is that enough now?" he asked.
"No, you need one more," said the vixen.
The wolf fetched a third sheep.
"Now you must look for a tailor," said the vixen.
"Where can I find one, sister vixen?"
"I know a good tailor. Let's go to him."
The vixen took the wolf to the meadow. There among the bushes
a tethered stallion was grazing.



"There he is!" said she.

"That's not a tailor, but a stallion! Well, sister vixen, like it or not, you haven't got much sense!"

The vixen took offence:

"Hold your tongue and stop talking nonsense. I always have been sensible and I always shall be, but you have always been a fool, and you always will be, as long as you live."

Now the wolf was offended, and said in a rage:

"We shall see, which of us is wiser!"

"Don't boast beforehand," said the vixen, "just look round, and you'll be skinned."

"Who by?" snarled the wolf, showing his teeth.

"By the master of this stallion."

"Impossible!" sneered the wolf, who could not believe her.

"You'll see. What is this stallion tethered to?" the vixen asked the wolf.



"To the rope."

The vixen burst out laughing:

"You see what a fool you are!"

"Why?" asked the wolf, giving a jump.

"The stallion is tethered to the stake."

"Impossible!" said the wolf, raising his eyebrows.

"Let's go and I'll show you."

The vixen took the wolf to the stake, to which the end of the rope was bound, took off the rope, made a noose and threw it round his neck. Before the wolf could look round, he found himself in the noose. Then the fox ran up to the stallion and began to wave her tail. The stallion took fright and dashed off home like a shot, dragging the wolf behind him to his master, who skinned him on the spot.



Meanwhile the vixen returned to the forest, buried the sheep in the moss to keep them for later. She took only the sheep's brains for her dinner. She made herself comfortable under a fir-tree and began eating.

Suddenly a bear appeared, the one who had eaten the bull-calf.

"What are you eating, sister vixen?" asked the bear.

"Brains. Are you blind?"

"Where did you get them?"

"Out of my head. You can get some too, if you wish."

"How?"

"Quite simple: take a run and strike your head against an oak-tree — the brains will just leap out."

"Thank you, sister vixen, for your good advice. I'll take it at once. I've been wanting to eat something for a long time."

He found the stoutest oak-tree he could, took a run at it and dashed his head against it with all his strength.

And that was the end of the bear.

The trickster-vixen had her fill of the bear's brains, and went to drink down her dinner with water from the spring.





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